AmeriCorps*VISTA

"Fighting Poverty with Passion"

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AmeriCorps*VISTA

- Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) has been helping to bring individuals and communities out of poverty for over 40 years.

- It is sponsored by the Federal Agency called the <u>Corporation for National and Community Service</u>.

AmeriCorps*VISTA

- Approximately 6,500 Members serve in low-income communities throughout the United States

- Members are assigned to local agencies ("project sponsors") and focus on building community capacity, mobilizing community resources, and increasing self-reliance to create **SUSTAINABLE RESULTS.**

- **http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zugQxvjgXAw**

VISTA Profile

- VISTA members <u>DO NOT</u> perform direct service
- Full-time, 12 month commitment
- Must be available to serve 24/7
- Cannot attend school or have employment
- Cannot accept money form any other source other than VISTA.
- Must be at least 18 years old. There is no upper age limit.
- Most programs seek members with college degrees or three years work experience

Benefits for VISTA Members

- **<u>AmeriCorps*VISTA Benefits (MI) – THE BASICS</u>**
- Living Allowance of $858/mo or $936/mo calculated as follows:
- Direct Deposit of Bi-Weekly Living Allowance
- Health coverage (cost of about $2700 is paid by the Corporation)
- Income Exclusion (persons receiving assistance or services under any federal, state or local governmental program before entering VISTA service cannot lose those benefits or have those benefits reduced as a result of their AmeriCorps*VISTA Living Allowance payments. Examples include Food Stamps, WIC, SSI, veterans benefits, public housing, etc.

Benefits for VISTA Members cont'd

- 1 of 2 possible post-service award options: (requires completion of service)

    a. $1200 cash Stipend b. $5,550 Education Award

- Initial Pre-Service Orientation and Training (all training expenses are provided including travel, lodging, meals and materials. Reimbursement of incidental travel expenses for VISTA members is also provided)

- Member Development Training within 4 months of beginning VISTA service (CNCS pays up to $350 per VISTA)

- Life Insurance option ($2.07 per 2-week service period deducted from living allowance) – up to $10,000 policy

- Child Care up to $400/month per eligible child (for kids under 13 or disabled up to 18. There is an income eligibility criteria to qualify)

Benefits for VISTA Members cont'd

- Loan Forbearance (if selecting the Ed. Award post-service benefit option)

- Loan Interest payment (if selecting the Ed. Award post-service benefit option)

- Local travel reimbursement (if using personal vehicle for service activity. The reimbursement will come directly from the VISTA project or sites – not CNCS)

- Relocation allowance (these are available only to members that relocate 50 mile or more specifically for service):

  A. up to $550 (this is called 'moving-in' allowance)

  B. mileage from home of record to site (this is also available for return home after service has been completed)-currently 48.5 cents /mile

  C. baggage shipment of $25 per 100 miles up to max. of $500 (this is also available for return home after service has been completed)

Benefits for VISTA Members cont'd

- Up to 10 service days for medical leave (State Director can authorize up to 5 additional days with justification)

- Up to 10 service days for personal leave

- National Holidays that are recognized by the sponsoring/site organization hosting the VISTA may be non-service days (Christmas, Thanksgiving, Good Friday, Labor Day, Memorial Day, etc.). Other days (such as Spring Break, Summer Break, Christmas Break, etc.) are 'active service days' for VISTA members and host sites need to provide for service related activity if host organization offices are closed.

- Federal Tort Claims Act coverage (VISTA members may be provided federal coverage for liability and/or property damage caused by a member that arises out of his/her "official duties" for which the member would be liable under local law. Details of this benefit are provided during pre-service orientation.)

What Organizations Are Eligible?

- AmeriCorps*VISTA project sponsors/sites may be one of the following:

  - Federal, state, or local government agency, or

  - Must otherwise be a private, non-profit organization with a 501 (c) designation.

PROJECT SPONSORS
Must be able to:

- Direct the project
- Supervise the AmeriCorps*VISTA members
- Provide necessary administrative support to complete the goals and objectives of the project (in-kind contributions, i.e. office space, desk, phone, computer, etc.)
- Reimburse for "on assignment" transportation costs

Application Process

- Request information about VISTA and the Concept Paper.
- Submit a concept paper to State Office via e-mail
- If State Office approves your concept paper, then you will be asked to submit it with a full project application with a checklist of required documents into eGrants
- If approved, the designated VISTA Supervisor will attend pre-service orientation training and begin recruiting VISTA members

Developing a Project

Purpose- Concept Paper

Project Work Plan Development

Sample Work Plan

VISTA Member Role

Guiding VISTA Principles

- Must help people <u>out</u> of poverty
- Have community buy in
- Bring institutional enhancement (build capacity) to the sponsoring organization
- Sustainable solutions (i.e. continue long after the VISTA is gone)
- Include outcome-based reporting that demonstrates actual impact of the project on the people that the organization serves

Questions We Ask About the Concept Paper

1. Did they include the Concept Paper (CP) questions in the document as requested? Does the concept paper actually address these questions and do so under the designated sections?

2. Has this organization had VISTAs before? If so, was it for this same initiative? If they had VISTA (s) for a different initiative, did they comply with reporting deadlines, use VISTA (s) appropriately, etc.?

3. Does (CP) address the low-income community need (s) clearly and use compelling local data/statistics to do so?

4. Does (CP) address <u>capacity building</u> for the organization? How? Do the organization goals and VISTA activities actually relate to serving and helping the <u>low-income community</u> out of poverty?

Questions We Ask About the Concept Paper cont'd

1. Are the VISTA activities direct service or indirect service? That is, does it address <u>sustainability</u>, "Who will do these things after the VISTA (s) is/are gone?" "Will there be systems, procedures, handbooks, manuals, databases, curriculum, volunteer recruiting/training, etc. created by the VISTA for ongoing use by the organization?"

2. Does the initiative justify the number of VISTAs requested?

3. Is (CP) easy to read/understand or is it vague using generalizations?

4. Are the goals and activities realistic and within a feasible time frame? Do the VISTA activities logically lead to accomplishing the overall goals?

5. Are measurements and tools discussed and will they clearly and accurately assess progress? Have they established a clear baseline, from which, to measure progress?

Applying in eGrants

- A step-by-step process will be provided by the State Office
- eGrants guidance information will be provided to create an account, submit the concept paper and the application
- State Office staff are available to assist you throughout the process

Project Plan

The project work plan should state in measurable and quantifiable terms:

- <u>Problem Definition/Need</u> – Defined in application narratives

- Goals – Broad in scope, impact on need statement that the project will achieve each year;

- <u>Activities</u> (steps to achieve goals);

- <u>Results</u> (specific <u>Outputs</u>, <u>Intermediate Outcomes</u> and <u>End Outcomes</u>) linked to the achievement of the overarching goals; and

- The <u>specific dates</u> (use CNCS quarter end dates) in which you expect to achieve your goals, activities and results.

PROJECT Performance Measures

- All results must be clearly defined, quantifiable, and measurable
- <u>Outputs</u> – "Ingredients to a cake recipe"
- <u>Intermediate Outcomes</u> – changes or benefits midway through the annual process of the project
- <u>End Outcomes</u> – positive changes that your project ultimately hopes to achieve

Project Outputs/Outcomes

Remember . . . the focus must be:

- Directed toward alleviating problems of low-income communities, and

- Directly relate to the overall AmeriCorps*VISTA project application

Project Plan Timeline

- Project Plan duration is a 12- month period, however the goal is for 3 years

- Each output and outcome has a planned period of accomplishment

- Use specific CNCS quarter dates (coincides with your quarterly report periods)

  - Quarter 1 (CNCS) ends <u>12/31</u>
  - Quarter 2 (CNCS) ends <u>3/31</u>
  - Quarter 3 (CNCS) ends <u>6/30</u>
  - Quarter 4 (CNCS) ends <u>9/30</u>

A SUCCESSFUL PROJECT PLAN Contains:

- A clear set of Goals and Results that use a "Logic Model" to map out how the Sponsor intends to achieve clear and measurable outcomes

- Contains a clear plan for <u>sustainability</u> of the project by the sponsoring agency

Sample Project Plan

Column A Project Plan for: Non-Profit Services Goals and Objectives Service Year: 2007-2008	Column B Date(s)	Column C Accomplishments
Identify **Goal(s) to which member's activities are directed.** **Goal 1:** To strengthen organizational and/or community human capacity.	Year 1	
Activities: What are the action steps needed to accomplish this goal? 1. Assess knowledge level of the community organizations or program 2. Develop press releases, newsletters, brochures, etc. to educate community 3. Develop and implement volunteer recruitment strategies 4. Adopt a volunteer management system to track hours and donations 5. Provide opportunities for volunteers to serve 6. Provide opportunities for volunteers to evaluate their service 7. Service projects completed benefiting the organization/community		
Output: New volunteers are recruited for various service projects. Indicator: Number of new volunteers recruited Target: 1,900 new volunteers recruited Instrument: Volunteer sign-in sheets maintained at individual sites	6/30/08	
Intermediate Outcome: Increased human capacity due to an increase in volunteer hours served. Indicator: Number of volunteer hours served. Target: 29,000 volunteer hours served. Instrument: Log of volunteer hours maintained at individual sites	9/30/08	
End Outcome: Community and organizational human capacity strengthened Indicator: # of service projects completed benefiting organization/community. Target: 60 service projects completed benefiting the organization/community. Instrument: Quarterly reports from individual sites.	12/31/08	22

VISTA Member Activities

- Must be focused on achieving the outcomes of the project work plan

- Must be <u>indirect service</u> activities leading to capacity building (that is sustainable) for the organization as it relates to serving the low-income population.

- Must be written for a one-year period

Sample Member Activities

- Member tasks and activities for Year 1:
  - Producing outreach materials for volunteer recruitment
  - Recruiting community volunteers
  - Meeting with local business owners to solicit assistance in designing job readiness training sites
  - Setting up teachers' referral system to select youth candidates for the program
  - Researching and developing funding resources to ensure project sustainability

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Sustainable Solutions

- There are several ways to ensure the project continues after its 3-year project cycle.

- Some include:
  - Creating a community volunteer recruiting system
  - Securing funds to hire additional staff
  - Develop a coalition of community stakeholders to foster sustainability
  - Leaving behind developed materials and how to manuals

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COST SHARE

The "FAST TRACK – but NOT a requirement

- By sponsoring an AmeriCorps*VISTA Partnership Project, you increase the availability of AmeriCorps*VISTA resources to your agency.

- Agencies must have adequate funds to cover the direct costs of their AmeriCorps*VISTAs' living allowance. The cost per year is approximately $10,000 per VISTA member.

- **RSVP: Retired and Senior Volunteer Program**

  - Operated by Catholic Social Services of Wayne County, through a grant from CNCS
  - Currently, they place **996** volunteers in 140 non-profit volunteer sites. Those volunteers in turn provided 197,504 volunteer hours in this past year.

  - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ko_MOMeqNP8

CONTACT INFORMATION

- For more information on developing an AmeriCorps*VISTA project at your organization, please contact the Corporation State Office at:

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